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# EDUCATION WEEK

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## New Study Raises Concerns About Adult Literacy

### *Many Said Unable To Cope In Technological Society*

By Lynn Olson

WASHINGTON—Although basic illiteracy is not widespread among the nation's young adults, many lack the degree of literacy needed to function well in a technological society, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported here last week.

Six percent of people in their early 20's read below the 4th-grade level, the federally funded study found, and 5 percent cannot perform such "routine or uncomplicated tasks" as filling out a job application or totaling two entries on a bank-deposit slip.

Moreover, the study of 3,600 adults ages 21 to 25 reported that performance plummeted as tasks became more difficult. Some 91 percent of those surveyed, for example, could not find and paraphrase an unfamiliar theme in a short poem. And 90 percent were unable to use unit pricing to choose the best buy in a grocery store.

"People are not walking around bumping into walls because they can't read," said Irwin S. Kirsch, the study's project director. "The question is whether people with only moderate literacy skills have the flexibility to shift into new environments."

The findings have major implications for the nation's public schools, according to Archie E. Lapointe, executive director of NAEP. He cited the need to expand dropout-prevention programs, place greater emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, and increase the availability of preschool and early-intervention programs for children whose parents are poorly educated.

The study found that young adults who dropped out of high school had far greater difficulty performing various literacy tasks than did their peers who graduated.

Although 72 percent of all young adults could write a letter explaining an error on a bill, for example, only 23 percent of those with eight years or less of schooling could do so. And only 41 percent of those with some high-school experience succeeded at this "moderate" literacy task.

"It has been argued that many, if not most, of society's managerial, professional,


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## A 'Living Tribute'

***Families of the space shuttle Challenger's crew announce plans for a national science-education center in their honor. See story on page 10.***

## Tangle of Questions Confronts Schools Considering Drug-Testing Programs

By Debra Viadero

For Richard Stephens, a high-school principal in Alliance, Neb., signing up for the nation's war on drugs has not been a simple proposition.

Earlier this year, when his school's athletics director proposed testing student athletes

**First of a Two-Part Series**

for drugs, Mr. Stephens began a long struggle with the tangle of legal, ethical, financial, and administrative questions that hundreds of his counterparts nationwide may soon encounter.

"It's not something you can easily jump into," he says now.

The Alliance school board's lawyer, Thomas Danehey, agrees.

"My first question as an attorney was the reliability and validity of the tests," he says. "What do you do if a student tests positive? Do you suspend him or what?"

Beyond that, Mr. Danehey says, was the question of purpose. "We have not seen anything from anybody here that shows a need."

Before answers could be found, however, two larger uncertainties emerged.

First, the school board's insurance agent said liability coverage would not protect


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## Statistics Agency Needs Overhaul, Panelists Assert

### *Abolition of E.D. Center Raised as Last Option*

By Tom Mirga and Marleen Nienhuis

WASHINGTON—The Education Department's statistics-gathering agency is so badly flawed that it should either be substantially overhauled or abolished, a new report by a panel of the National Research Council has recommended.

"It is past time for those in positions of responsibility to face up to the risks and dangers of perpetuating the myriad and continuing problems" of the Center for Statistics, formerly known as the National Center for Education Statistics, wrote the panel of 12 nationally prominent statisticians and educators in a report released here last week.

They said that although they "continue to believe strongly that the center still has a future," wide-ranging actions must be taken to improve its image and the quality of the data it produces.

Unless such steps are taken, the panelists concluded, "serious consideration should be given to the more drastic alternatives of abolishing the center and finding other means to obtain and disseminate education data."

Among the steps they suggested are the establishment of an office of statistical standards and methodology within the center; the setting of, and rigorous adherence to, deadlines for key surveys; and a "com-


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## Citing Link to Economy, School Chiefs Plan Study of 'At Risk' Students' Needs

By Bill Montague

ST. PAUL—After a year of research into the link between education and economic development, the nation's chief state school officers will now turn their attention to a closely related topic—the needs of at-risk students.

Speaking here last week to a study commission of the Council of Chief State School Officers, the council's president-elect, David W. Hornbeck, outlined an agenda for examining the needs of poor, minority, and other disadvantaged students.

"When we ask what group of students in the common schools have we done least well by, indeed we see that we have failed to meet the needs of minority students," said Mr. Hornbeck, the Maryland superintendent of schools.

When the chiefs gather for their annual convention in November, Mr. Hornbeck said, he will ask them to formally direct the commission to begin working on the topic.

The panel, which is composed of deputy and assistant chiefs from 57 states and territories, convened to draft a set of specific recommendations on economic development for the chiefs to consider next month.

In his remarks, Mr. Hornbeck stressed that the issue of at-risk students is closely linked to the issue of economic growth at the state and national levels.


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## Also in the news

**A.C.T. Scores Rise; S.A.T.'s Unchanged**
Experts are encouraged by the performance of college-bound seniors on admissions tests, but they remain concerned about the wide gap between the scores of whites and minorities.

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**Foundations Focusing On Structural Change**
Grantmakers involved in programs for public education foresee a trend away from providing funds for narrow projects and toward broader efforts involving school structure.

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**Tax, Spending Bills Seen Costly for Teachers**
The new federal tax revision will eliminate a popular "tax holiday" provision for retiring teachers, and a budget-reconciliation bill mandates Medicare coverage for teachers.

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## IN SUMMARY

**Comparing Student Achievement**
High-school juniors in eight Southern states have reading and writing skills that, for the most part, equal those of their counterparts across the nation, according to a new study. **Story on Page 5.**

**Metric Education**
Business leaders and educators meeting last week said that if the U. S. is to become fully competitive in world trade, it must emphasize metric education in all areas of the curriculum. **Story on Page 6.**

**A Guide to Drug Tests**
In an interview, an expert from the center for human toxicology at the University of Utah answers some of the most commonly asked questions about drug testing. **Story on Page 9.**

**A 'Living' Memorial**
Family members of the Challenger crew have launched a campaign to establish a center for space-science education as a "living" tribute to the shuttle's seven astronauts. **Story on Page 10.**

**Aid Withheld in Utah**
To help meet the state's constitutional mandate to balance its budget, the Governor of Utah has blocked the payment of $12.5 million in state aid to school districts. **Story on Page 12.**

**Concern About Children**
A new poll reveals widespread public concern about the problems of children, as well as criticism of the performance of parents, schools, and government in dealing with those problems. **Story on Page 15.**


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# THE WEEK

## NATIONAL

### South African Blacks Study at Prep Schools

A consortium of six independent schools will provide a year of intensive training to 30 black South African students over the next three years to prepare them for study in American colleges.

The agreement, which grew out of a five-year-old program at Northfield-Mount Hermon School in Northfield, Mass., is aimed at providing college-preparation aid to students who have the potential to become leaders in their country, according to Kim Nilsen, public-relations director at Northfield-Mount Hermon.

Under the program, students selected by a South African agency will attend the schools for one year to improve their English, mathematics, and study skills. The schools pay their tuition, transportation costs, and personal expenses.

Of the six students who have participated in the program so far, only one left college, Mr. Nilsen said. The students, who attend Amherst College, Earlham College, the University of Colorado, and the University of Massachusetts, all plan to return to South Africa when they complete their education, he said.

This year, seven students are taking preparatory courses at five of the consortium schools: three at Northfield-Mount Hermon, and one each at the Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, N.H.; Milton Academy in Milton, Mass.; the Emma Willard School in Troy, N.Y.; and Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass. Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Mass., plans to join the program next year.

The program is being paid for by a $32,500 grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation and a $25,000 grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. In addition, a Northfield-Mount Hermon alumnus and a Worcester, Mass.-based insurance company have made donations.

### Preparation of Women For College Is Examined

The District of Columbia, Mississippi, and New Mexico rated highest in "preparing young women for college," according to a recent survey by the Project on Equal Education Rights, a division of the National Organization for Women Legal Defense and Education Fund.

"But no state is doing an outstanding job," added PEER's "1986 Report Card," based on an assessment of Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, college-enrollment figures, and types of college degrees awarded to women.

Montana, Maine, Idaho, and Utah received the group's lowest ratings. The District of Columbia, despite a high dropout rate and low level of student achievement, received praise for female students' high ambitions in postsecondary education.

The survey also compared states' female enrollments in vocational training for predominantly male occupations. California, Ohio, Michigan, and Oklahoma were most exemplary, according to the survey, followed by Pennsylvania and North Dakota. Alabama came in last, the group said.

PEER awarded its "Silver Snail"—a citation for "national leaders who have been notorious in their opposition to equal educational opportunities for women, minorities, and disabled students"—to Undersecretary of Education Gary L. Bauer; Donald Regan, White House chief of staff; Marion G. (Pat) Robertson, a television evangelist; and Beverly LaHaye, director of Concerned Women for America.

### Boy Scouts Encouraging Organ, Tissue Donations

The Boy Scouts of America this week are launching a nationwide campaign to encourage people to let their families know that they would like to donate their organs or tissue if they are killed in an accident.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation has provided $400,000 to underwrite the program, which is expected to involve up to 1.5 million youth volunteers and to reach 6 million families.

Other corporate support is being provided by Dow Chemical Company, which has lent a top executive to the national scouting organization to coordinate the program; Eastman Kodak Corporation, which is providing visual-aid materials; and International Paper Company, which will donate message space on milk cartons and grocery bags.

In addition to distributing literature and donor-awareness cards during the three-month campaign, Scouts will appear before school, community, and civic groups to talk about the program.

"If enough people express their desire to become donors to their families, the serious shortage of organs and tissues can be alleviated, and thousands of people can return to healthy and vital lives," Ben H. Love, chief Scout executive, said.

The program is being conducted in cooperation with the American Council on Transplantation, an umbrella organization of some 80 health-related agencies.

## STATES

### Arkansas Stiffens Rules For Teacher Education

The Arkansas Board of Education has approved new regulations for teacher-education programs designed to raise the caliber of future teachers in the state.

Based on the recommendations of a task force convened by Gov. Bill Clinton in 1983, the regulations will require prospective high-school teachers to meet the same requirements for an academic major as non-teacher-education students.

They also require candidates for teacher-education programs to have a maximum 2.5 grade-point average in college, a passing score on the Pre-Professional Skills Test, and grades of C or above in courses in written and oral communication and mathematics.

In addition, teacher-training programs must be accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and ensure that at least 80 percent of their graduates pass the professional-knowledge and specialty-area tests of the National Teacher Examinations.

The new requirements are based on the work of Governor Clinton's 19-member task force on teacher education, certification, and evaluation, which was formed at the request of the state legislature. The policies, approved last month by the board, will go into effect with the freshman class of 1987.

## DISTRICTS

### Former Student Is Shot While Visiting School

Two students at a California high-school have been charged with murder in the fatal shooting of a graduate who had returned to the school to visit a teacher.

The students—a 15-year-old and a 17-year-old—were arrested after Antoine Thompson, 18, of Los Angeles was shot last month in an argument over use of a pay telephone at Fairfax High School near West Hollywood, according to police.

Mr. Thompson, who suffered from dyslexia, had come to the school to tell his former special-education teacher how pleased he was to be in college and to discuss his interest in getting help with his studies, said Warren Steinberg, the school's principal.

"It was one of those freak things that occur," Mr. Steinberg said, noting that he believed Mr. Thompson did not know the accused students, who had both transferred to the school.

### N.Y.C. Widens Access To Selective Schools

The New York City Board of Education has voted to use some random selections to ensure that all students have an opportunity to attend one of the city's career-oriented schools or programs, which have been criticized for being too exclusionary.

# A.C.T. Scores Up Slightly for 1986; S.A.T. Averages Hold Steady

By Lynn Olson

High-school seniors in the class of 1986 scored at least as well as 1985 graduates on the nation's two major college-admissions tests, continuing what experts describe as a five-year upswing in performance.

Students taking the American College Testing assessment received an average composite score of 18.8, on a scale of 1 to 36. The score, up slightly from last year's average of 18.6, is the highest of any class since 1974, officials with the American College Testing Program said last week.

Seniors in the class of 1986 who took the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the other major college-admissions examination, received the same average scores as those in the class before—431 out of a possible 800 on the test's verbal section and 475 out of 800 on the mathematics section, the College Board announced last week.

The College Board also reported that the average of scores on the 14 Achievement Tests—one-hour multiple-choice exams in specific academic subjects—also remained unchanged from 1985, at 540 out of a possible 800.

Unlike the S.A.T., the A.C.T. measures students' performance in the natural and social sciences, as well as in English and math. Average scores rose from 18.1 to 18.5 on the English section, from 17.2 to 17.3 in math, from 21.2 to 21.4 in natural sciences, and from 17.4 to 17.6 in social sciences.

### Results Encouraging

Officials at both organizations described the 1986 test results as encouraging.

A.C.T. scores have been rising steadily for the past five years, said Oluf M. Davidsen, president of the Iowa City-based A.C.T.

"We cannot pinpoint all the causes for the continued gradual improvement in A.C.T. test performance," he said, "but quite likely some of the score increase is related to the renewed concern about educational quality."

He noted that states and districts are strengthening high-school graduation requirements, "and the relationship between core high-school courses taken and A.C.T. scores earned is compelling."

George H. Hanford, president of the College Board, said that while average scores on the S.A.T. did not improve, the number of college-bound seniors taking the test rose by 2.3 percent between 1985 and 1986, to a little more than 1 million.

## A.C.T. Scores

| | |
|---|---|
| 1972-73 | 19.2 |
| 1973-74 | 18.9 |
| 1974-75 | 18.6 |
| 1975-76 | 18.3 |
| 1976-77 | 18.4 |
| 1977-78 | 18.5 |
| 1978-79 | 18.6 |
| 1979-80 | 18.5 |
| 1980-81 | 18.5 |
| 1981-82 | 18.4 |
| 1982-83 | 18.3 |
| 1983-84 | 18.5 |
| 1984-85 | 18.6 |
| 1985-86 | 18.8 |

American College Testing Program composite test scores are reported on a scale of 1 to 36

SOURCE: American College Testing

Normally, when the number of test-takers goes up, he said, there is a tendency for scores to go down.

The number of seniors taking the A.C.T. decreased in 1986 to approximately 730,000, down about 9,000 from 1985. David S. Crockett, the A.C.T.'s vice president of public affairs, said the decline in the number of students taking the exam did not affect overall test scores.

Officials agreed that while A.C.T. scores rose in 1986 and S.A.T. scores remained the same, the difference is not significant.

"The trend line for both programs in the last five years has been on the up side," Mr. Crockett said. "I think they're consistent in that regard."

The A.C.T. primarily serves students and colleges in 28 states in the Midwest, South, and West, where many public colleges and universities require the test for admission.

The S.A.T., developed by the Educational Testing Service, is used most extensively by students and colleges on the East and West coasts, where it is an admissions tool for most private higher-education institutions.

### Long-Term Trends

The public has often viewed scores on the two college-admissions tests as a sign of how well American schools are educating their children.

The downward slide in S.A.T. scores between 1963 and 1980—when they hit a low of 424 on the verbal section and 471 in math—prompted widespread attacks on the quality of elementary and secondary education in the United States.

After scores on the test began rising, between 1981 and 1985, many saw the gain as a sign that the nation's education system was turning around. This year's combined average for the verbal and math sections, however, only returns performance to its 1975 level.

Average composite scores on the A.C.T. did not begin declining until 1970 and leveled off in 1976.

Officials with both organizations cautioned against attributing too much significance to the test results.

"There is a swing back toward meritocracy, if you will, in the country, and that's where things are headed," Mr. Hanford said. But he added: "I'm always against overinterpreting. You look at other factors, too. There are a lot of other ways of assessing the quality of schools than S.A.T. scores."

### Minority Performance

Minority students' composite scores on the A.C.T. increased in 1986 by approximately 0.5 to 0.6 points for blacks, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Orientals, and Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics.

But with the exception of Asian Americans, the scores of all minority groups continued to trail far behind those of Caucasian students.

For example, the average scores for black and white students, respectively, were 14 and 19.2 in English, 10.4 and 18.2 in math, 15.5 and 22.2 in natural sciences, and 11.7 and 18.6 in social studies.

## S.A.T. Scores

| | Verbal | Math |
|---|---|---|
| 1973 | 445 | 481 |
| 1974 | 444 | 480 |
| 1975 | 434 | 472 |
| 1976 | 431 | 472 |
| 1977 | 429 | 470 |
| 1978 | 429 | 468 |
| 1979 | 427 | 467 |
| 1980 | 424 | 466 |
| 1981 | 424 | 466 |
| 1982 | 426 | 467 |
| 1983 | 425 | 468 |
| 1984 | 426 | 471 |
| 1985 | 431 | 475 |
| 1986 | 431 | 475 |

Scholastic Aptitude Test average scores are reported on a scale of 200 to 800

SOURCE: Scholastic Aptitude Test

Moreover, with the exception of Mexican Americans—1,000 more of whom took the A.C.T. in 1986 than in 1985—the number of minorities taking the test dropped. The smaller number of minority test-takers, however, did not affect overall test scores, Mr. Crockett said.

Samuel D. Cargile, director of the A.C.T.'s office of minority education, attributed the improved performance by minorities to the increased number of minority students, particularly blacks and Hispanics, taking core academic courses.

"It is likely that completing more coursework in relevant subject areas has resulted in higher A.C.T. test scores for minority-group students," he said.

Asian-American students continued to outperform other students on the math portion of the A.C.T. Their average score was 20.8, compared with 18.2 for Caucasians.

Scores on the S.A.T. were not available for different minority groups for 1986. Although both the A.C.T. and the S.A.T. include related questionnaires that ask students about their personal background and characteristics, such as their ethnic group, the S.A.T. questionnaire is being revised, making such information temporarily unavailable.

Mr. Hanford said, however, that the test data do not indicate any "radical" change in minority students' performance compared with that of previous years.

In recent years, the College Board has regularly reported a large but narrowing gap between the test scores of black and white students. But although all minority groups showed gains in S.A.T. scores in 1985, officials noted a "disturbing" decrease in the number of black students taking the exam that year.

Black students account for about 8 percent to 10 percent of all test-takers for both the S.A.T. and the A.C.T.

### Sex Differences

As in previous years, more women took both tests in 1986 than men.

The scores of both women and men on the A.C.T. increased, with the exception of women's math scores, which remained stable at 16. Males continued to score significantly higher than women on all but the English section of the A.C.T. and on both the verbal and math sections of the S.A.T.

"We just don't have the information" on why men continue to outperform women, Mr. Crockett of the A.C.T. said. "Anything we said in that regard would be pure speculation."

When registering for the A.C.T., students also indicate the majors they plan to enter and their possible career choices. The percentage of students interested in courses and careers in teaching increased slightly in 1986—up a percentage point from 1985 to 7 percent. The two most popular career choices remained business and the health-related fields.

Similar information was not available for S.A.T. test-takers.

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# Pregnancy-Prevention Project Studied

Inner-city girls who participated in an experimental pregnancy-prevention program at two Baltimore schools were far less likely to become pregnant than girls at two city schools without such a program, a study has found.

After 28 months, the number of pregnancies among girls in the program declined by 30.1 percent from what it had been at the program's onset, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University who designed the project.

In contrast, a 57.6 percent increase in the number of pregnancies was reported among girls in the control group.

In addition, the researchers said, a comparison with the control group showed that girls who were virgins at the beginning of the program generally waited longer to first sexual intercourse—the median delay was seven months—and were more likely to obtain contraceptives before or soon after becoming sexually active.

The three-year program involved 1,700 male and female students at a junior high school and a senior high school.

It combined in-school sex education and counseling with after-school health and family-planning services provided by clinics located nearby.

The students in the control group followed the existing sex-education curriculum required by the state of Maryland.

The findings were published in the July issue of *Family Planning Perspectives*, a journal of Alan Guttmacher Institute, based in New York City. —T.M.